

Request for Proposals (RFP) for a Cooperative Agreement to Continue Operation of the Compliance Assistance Center for the Chemical Industry

I. Summary

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has funded the development and operation of ten national compliance assistance centers (Centers) to aid small and medium size businesses and local governments to better understand and comply with environmental regulations. EPA seeks a partner for the continued operation of the compliance assistance center for the chemical industry. Proposals meeting the criteria discussed below must be delivered to EPA by 5:00 p.m., June 18, 2003.

II. Background

In 1997, the Office of Compliance signed a Cooperative Agreement with Michigan Technological University (MTU) to develop and manage ChemAlliance, an on-line compliance assistance center for the Chemical industry. MTU in turn enlisted the support of two sub-recipients, the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and the University of Wisconsin. The ChemAlliance web site was launched in October 1998 and since then, MTU and its partners have been providing compliance assistance services to the chemical industry. EPA's Cooperative Agreement with MTU terminated in June 2001. In July 2001, EPA awarded the Cooperative Agreement to the Battelle Memorial Institute Pacific North West Division to continue the management & development of ChemAlliance. Under the Grants Competition Policy that went into effect October 1, 2002, EPA now competes any assistance agreement that will provide the recipient more than \$75,000 in a year.

In pursuant of this pilot competitive procedures for awarding Cooperative Agreement, the Agency is now seeking initial proposals for a compliance assistance center that will continue to deliver and enhance web compliance assistance services directed to the Chemical industry beginning July 2003. The funding for the first year of operation will be at \$140,000. Please note that under 40 CFR 30.36 EPA can obtain data and other works from the current ChemAlliance web site and provide it to the successful applicant in this competition, if necessary.

In general, the centers provide comprehensive, easy to understand sector-specific compliance information. The centers offer a variety of services, including web-sites, e-mail groups, fax-back systems, and telephone assistance, depending on the needs of the sector they are designed for. All the centers help business, tribes, local governments, and federal agencies identify specific regulations that apply to their activities, improve compliance with environmental regulations, and learn about pollution prevention approaches that can save money and resources. All centers can be accessed at www.assistancecenters.net.

EPA will review the responses to its April 2003 Request for Initial Proposals, and determine

whether certain initial proposals meet the eligibility criteria. EPA now seeks, by June 18, 2003, proposals from those eligible applicants for continued operation of the compliance assistance center for the chemical industry. EPA anticipates making approximately \$925,000 available over a five-year period for this purpose. EPA will partially fund each budget period and will consider funding the balance of budget requests contingent upon satisfactory progress as certified by the EPA Project Officer, the availability of funds, and EPA priorities.

III. Authority

EPA will, as its annual appropriation allows, award financial assistance to the successful applicant in the form of a cooperative agreement. As authorized by 31 U.S.C. §6305, EPA will be substantially involved in carrying out this project. Anticipated substantial involvement will include collaboration in carrying out the scope of work, technical assistance, approval of the substantive terms of contracts and subawards made with EPA funds, change of key personnel, and approval of project phases prior to continuation of the project.

The Agreement will be funded on a “multi-media” basis under Section 103 of the Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. §7403, Section 104 of the Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. §1254, Section 8001 of the Solid Waste Disposal Act, 42 U.S.C. §6981, Section 10 of the Toxic Substances Control Act, as amended, 15 U.S.C. §2609, and Section 20 of the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act, as amended, 7 U.S.C. §136r. Applicants are encouraged to review these statutes and ensure that all of the activities contained in their proposals are consistent with the scope of EPA’s authority.

IV. Applicant Eligibility.

Only those applicants that have been invited to participate following the Request for Initial Proposals are eligible.

V. Overview of the Chemical Industry Compliance Assistance Center

The ultimate goal for this proposed compliance assistance center is to serve as the “first-stop shop” for the chemical industry by providing easy to understand compliance information tailored specifically for the chemical industry. To achieve this goal, the recipient must:

- create linkages between the chemical businesses and the compliance assistance provider communities through the Internet.
- provide a forum where the chemical industry can share tools and knowledge and prevent duplicative efforts.
- continue to develop content (including technical, regulatory, and pollution prevention information) that will address the changing needs of the chemical industry.

VI. Project Proposal

All applicants must submit a proposal that identifies their ability to manage and develop an environmental compliance assistance center for the chemical industry. Project proposals must, at a minimum, include the following items: Executive Summary, Project Activities, the Center Management Plan, Past Experience and Qualifications of Key Personnel, Clients Needs, Available Technologies, Collaboration with Other Compliance Assistance Providers, and Program Measurement Plan as outlined below. EPA will negotiate a detailed scope of work with the successful applicant. The successful applicant will be asked to submit a Standard Form, 424, Application for Federal Assistance following negotiation of the work plan. Please note that the final application will be subject to the Executive Order 12372 Intergovernmental Review Process.

Executive Summary: An executive summary of the planned project.

Project Activities: The proposal should include a description of the following planned activities including milestones:

- Describe the approaches that will be used to adopt the data and information provided by EPA to ensure the same level of compliance assistance services are available to the chemical industry on a timely and seamless manner.
- Describe the approaches to identify and close gaps in environmental compliance assistance services currently provided to the chemical industry by the existing compliance assistance center and other assistance providers .
- Describe the approach that will be used to ensure that input from the chemical industry, states, tribal and local government will be solicited to enhance the services provided by the proposed center.
- Describe the approach that will be used to measure the success of the proposed center.
- Describe the approaches that will be used to conduct outreach to the chemical industry and promote use of the proposed center.

Management Plan: A thorough discussion of how the grant will be managed:

- *Internal Management Plan:* Describe how the applicant will ensure the day to day success of the project. This description should include the proposed organizational structure, supervisory responsibilities, and a proposed staffing plan.
- *External Management Plan:* Project proposals must describe how the cooperative agreement recipient will solicit partners to assist it maintain the compliance assistance center and include the proposed organizational structure that illustrates the interrelationships between the primary project partners and supporting entities to the center. Please note that all contracts for the purchase of goods and services must comply with the competitive procurement requirements of 40 CFR Part 30.

- *Marketing and Outreach:* A description of a marketing and outreach activity plan to promote the services provided by the proposed compliance assistance center.
- *Financial Plan:* A financial plan for the project that identifies all sources of funds. Although EPA does not require matching funds, the grant recipient is encouraged to provide information regarding resources (cash/in-kind services) that they would commit to manage the chemical industry compliance assistance center. The financial plan should break out planned expenditures by both activity (e.g., maintenance of the web site) and object class (e.g., personnel, travel).

Factors that EPA will evaluate in the financial plan include:

- ~ Ability to readily assume the operations of the data and information provided by EPA (if necessary) or provide the same level of services in a cost effective manner, and
- ~ Ability to partner with other organizations to secure funding or in-kind services to achieve at least partial self-sustainability.

Past Experience and Qualifications of Key Personnel:

- Project proposals must describe the applicants experience in developing and maintaining web based environmental compliance assistance services, or similar projects, and its experience in working with the chemical industry. Detailed descriptions of projects involving the chemical industry will be particularly important to EPA.
- The applicant should also provide information on its experience in managing Federal financial assistance, including the results of audits or monitoring by the awarding agency.
- Project proposals must include a description of the qualifications and experience of key personnel (particularly in relation to the chemical industry) and their responsibilities. A detailed description of how the qualification and/or experience of each key personnel match with his/her responsibilities is important.

Clients Needs: Understanding the environmental needs of the chemical industry is critical to the success and sustainability of the compliance assistance center. Project proposals should address the following areas:

- Since the chemical industry is very diverse, how will the recipient ensure the web site is broad enough to be useful to the entire industry but specific enough to address individual sub-sector's needs?
- Specifically, how will the experiences of the key personnel enhance the compliance assistance center's operation?
- How will the recipient identify the needs of the chemical industry?
- What services will the recipient provide?

Available Technologies: Since the proposed compliance assistance center is to maintain and

expand the existing services, the grant recipient should be equipped with proper software and hardware that can readily support the operations of the data and information EPA provides, if necessary. The proposal should identify the equipment or software that the applicant has access to in order to support these functions. If the applicant does not have access to the necessary equipment, describe how the applicant will provide the same level of compliance assistance services.

Currently, the ChemAlliance web site is operated using the following types of equipment and software:

- The web site is located on a shared Pentium-III equipped server running version 4 of Microsoft's Internet Information Server (IIS 4.0) software, operating on Windows NT Server 4.0.
- Site administration is performed using Microsoft Front Page 2000, and most pages on the site utilize so-called Front Page Server Extension components, most notably the use of server side include files for header and footer functions.
- Many key functions of the ChemAlliance site, including the news capability, "Expert Help", Virtual Plant Tour, regulatory glossary and web links database, are written using the Active Server Pages (ASP) scripting environment, using VBScript as the primary scripting language.
- Database content in ChemAlliance is stored in a relational database created using MS Access 97 as the database environment.
- Database access to the scripting environment is provided using the Active Data Objects (ADO) object model.
- Client-side scripting (used primarily for the virtual plant tour and other pages where "rollover" effects are utilized) are written in JavaScript for cross-platform compatibility.
- The ChemAlliance regulatory discussion list is hosted on a separate list server, running the commercial (non-demo) version of Lyris (www.lyris.com).

For additional information regarding the current compliance assistance center for the chemical industry, please visit www.chemalliance.org.

Collaboration with Other Compliance Assistance Providers: The proposal must explain how the center will interact and collaborate with other compliance assistance providers including the other Compliance Assistance Centers, the Small Business Assistance Programs (SBAPs), the Technical Assistance Providers (TAPs), the Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), trade associations, and products/services vendors and distributors. Specifically, the proposal should address the following:

- The ways the applicant will collaborate with other compliance assistance providers to leverage limited resources to provide maximum benefit to the chemical industry.
- Methods that the applicant will use to promote the use of its proposed chemical industry compliance assistance center among the compliance assistance community.

Program Measurement Plan: The proposal should specify a plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the proposed compliance assistance center and ensuring continuous improvement. The proposal must include a measurement plan that will address the following:

- The user statistics the applicant will collect to determine the trend and usefulness of the center.
- Ways the applicant will obtain customer feedback besides participating in periodic EPA-sponsored on-line surveys.

VII. Pre-Application Assistance

Eligible and interested applicants may contact Mr. Joseph Hall with questions. EPA will post answers to significant or frequently asked questions on a web-site at <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/assistance/centers/index.html>. Applicants are encouraged to review these questions and answers prior to submitting proposals. Please note, the Agency cannot provide guidance on proposal development or other advice that may provide a competitive advantage.

VIII. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

EPA will use the following criteria to rank applications. Each proposal will be given a high, medium or low rating for each criterion. Each criterion will receive equal weight when EPA reviewers determine the overall merit of the proposal. Based on the ratings, EPA reviewers will select up to 2 proposals for consideration by the Agency selecting official.

1. Comprehensiveness of proposed approach to service delivery.
2. Innovations that may enhance compliance assistance services available to the chemical industry.
3. Demonstrated understanding of environmental compliance challenges faced by the chemical industry.
4. Cost effectiveness and efficiency of proposed operations.
5. Qualifications and experience of key personnel in relation to their responsibilities.
6. Previous performance history on similar projects.
7. Technical capabilities to readily support the data and information provided by EPA, if necessary.
8. Soundness of approach to collaborating with other compliance assistance providers.
9. Soundness of approach to outreach to all segments of the chemical industry.
10. Soundness of approach to measuring the effectiveness of the compliance assistance center's services.

IX. Proposal Submission

Interested applicants should submit three copies of the proposal to the following address to be post-marked by June 18, 2003.

Joseph Hall (2224A)
US Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Each proposal should not exceed 30 pages and it should include all of the information requested in this solicitation with a break down of budget for each category. A team of EPA personnel will evaluate the proposals based on the criteria set forth in Section VII and identify two applications for further consideration. An authorized Agency Approval Official in OECA will select the final applicant. An EPA award official will make the final award. EPA is expected to select the final cooperative agreement recipient by June 27, 2003. For questions, please contact Joseph Hall by phone at (202) 564-2271, or email at hall.joseph@epa.gov.